

VZCZCXRO7153  
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN  
DE RUEHLG #0218 1051416  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 141416Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5189  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS LILONGWE 000218

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S - E. PELLETREAU  
DEPT ALSO FOR PRM - M. LANGE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [KDEM](#) [ZI](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: MALAWI - UNHCR CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR ZIMBABWE REFUGEES

¶1. (U) Summary: UNHCR Malawi told emboff that they have contingency plans in place in the event that sustained post-election violence forces Zimbabwean refugees into Malawi. Due to close historic and family ties, Zimbabwean migrants have so far blended into Malawian society and few have shown up at the refugee camp. In the event of a large influx of refugees, UNHCR and the government of Malawi will reopen the recently-closed Luwani Refugee Camp in southern Malawi which still has shelters, schools, and medical clinics in place. While the government of Malawi remains concerned about foreigners taking jobs away from locals, some have expressed new concerns that without a national identification system, Zimbabweans in Malawi could register for next year's elections in Malawi. End Summary

#### Contingency Plan in Place for Zimbabwean Refugees

-----

¶2. (U) UNHCR told emboff that contingency plans are in place in the event that sustained post-election violence sends Zimbabwean refugees into Malawi. With strong ties stretching back to the colonial era, some estimate there could be three million Zimbabweans with ancestry from Malawi. Many Zimbabweans have already come to Malawi, and assisted by friends or distant relatives have successfully blended into Malawian society. Only a few families have actually shown up at the refugee camp seeking refuge.

¶3. (U) In the event of a large influx of refugees, UNHCR said the government of Malawi will be forced to reopen the Luwani refugee camp. The Dzaleka camp in central Malawi only has capacity for approximately 1500 more refugees but UNHCR said during the height of the Mozambican war, close to 200,000 refugees were in Luwani. Luwani was closed last year in an effort to consolidate Malawi's refugee population of just over 9000 in one place. While Luwani still has shelters, schools, and medical facilities, the GOM has begun transforming the camp into a prison facility. In addition to identifying space and shelter, UNHCR is working with the World Food Program to line up additional food sources and has begun to procure additional medical supplies as a precaution.

#### Concerns about Zims Being Used for Election Fraud

-----

¶4. (U) While the government of Malawi continues to have concerns about foreigners taking jobs from locals, some are expressing new concerns that the lack of a national identity system in Malawi could allow migrants from Zimbabwe to register to vote in the 2009 presidential elections. It is difficult to determine the magnitude and distribution of Zimbabwean migrants in Malawi, but opposition leaders have already advised the Malawi Electoral Commission that it needs to be able to account for the risk.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The more prosperous economies of South Africa and Botswana may be more appealing, but with strong ties, porous borders, and an excellent reputation as a host of refugees, Malawi could be an appealing destination if prolonged violence becomes an

issue in Zimbabwe. Malawians would be more likely to tolerate refugees from Zimbabwe than other nationals, such as Somali and Congolese, who are currently crossing multiple borders to claim asylum in Malawi. The likelihood of Zimbabweans being used to vote for candidates in an election seems unlikely at this point and is just one of many issues the opposition has raised to the electoral commission to protest the lack of consultation by government in the commission's composition.

EASTHAM